

The mile-long Victoria Falls divides Zambia and Zimbabwe.

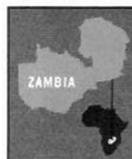
AFRICA HEATS UP

ADVENTURE LUXURY WILDLIFE

## VITALS

- ▶ **VISITOR NUMBERS:** 457,000 in 2000; 610,000 in 2004
- ▶ **BEST TIME TO GO:** May through August for cool, dry weather; August through October for the best wildlife viewing.
- ▶ **AIRLINE SERVICE FROM THE U.S.:** Air France, British Airways, KLM, and South African Airways.
- ▶ **CAPITAL:** Lusaka.
- ▶ **OFFICIAL LANGUAGE:** English.
- ▶ **SPECIAL SAFETY CONCERNS:** Avoid areas near the Congo border.
- ▶ **TOUR COST:** Approximately \$400 per person per day.

## Wild Ride



Widespread corruption and rampant poaching dampened Zambia's appeal for much of the

last 30 years. But since 2000, the government has made a concerted effort to protect wildlife and court tourists by cracking down on illegal hunting and upgrading the national parks. The country has also benefited from neighboring Zimbabwe's political and economic turmoil: Zambia is now the premier destination for viewing Victoria Falls, one of the natural wonders of the world.

**THE BIG PICTURE** Zambia is large—about the size of Texas—and has 19 national parks, where

### HASSLE FACTOR *medium*

Independent travel is not advised: Roads are improving, but many are still in poor condition and signposts rare. Visitors are advised to travel by air or with an experienced driver familiar with the surroundings. Electricity is sometimes rationed, and blackouts are common. On the bright side, apart from the areas near the Congo's border, much of the country is quite safe.

both wildlife and luxury lodges are plentiful. Livingstone, the gateway to Victoria Falls, has a burgeoning tourist industry and several museums worth a visit. The dry season is best for viewing big game, although the rainy season has its own rewards, including verdant scenery and discounted prices. Lodges are becoming world-class, and the service is typically Zambian, meaning remarkably friendly.

**THE DRAW** **South Luangwa National Park** has a number of excellent lodges and camps and is the most accessible of the four parks in the wildlife-rich Luangwa River Valley. It's best known for its walking safaris—rare in Africa—in which visitors explore by foot or even trek from one camp to the next. With its thick woodlands and gentle waterways, the **Lower Zambezi National Park**, on the other hand, is best seen by boat or, better still, by canoe. In Zambia's oldest and largest park, **Kafue**, the best game viewing is on the Busanga Plains, which support roan and sable antelopes, elephants, lions, and cheetahs. Of course, there's **Victoria Falls**, as well as lesser-known but spectacular cata-

acts including **Sioma**, which stretches like a giant horseshoe-shaped curtain across the entire Zambezi River; and **Kalambo**, Africa's second highest waterfall, which spills into **Lake Tanganyika**. History buffs interested in David Livingstone's missionary journey should visit the village of Chitambo, near **Kasanka National Park**, where he died and where his heart is buried beneath a tree.

Adventurous types can pursue white-water rafting on the Zambezi (arguably the world's most exciting day-trip), jet-boating, horseback riding, rappelling, bungee jumping, elephant riding, canoeing, and flightseeing. **Safari Par Excellence** arranges all of the above (260-3-320606; safpar.com).

**THE DIGS** Lusaka has fine hotels, but the most stylish accommodations are in the national parks. In the dusty bush, far from civilization, fresh linens and chilled chardonnay are now customary. A favorite with South Africans and Europeans, **Tongabezi Lodge**, on the banks of the Zambezi, has five lovely

cottages and four spacious houses. Activities include boat safaris, visits to Victoria Falls, and a trip to Livingstone Island, where you can swim in a pool on the lip of the falls near where Livingstone himself once stood (260-3-324450; tongabezi.com; doubles, \$710–\$1,060, all-inclusive). At **Chaminuka Lodge**, in a nature reserve outside Lusaka, hundreds of original works of Zambian art decorate the 18 chalets and the common areas



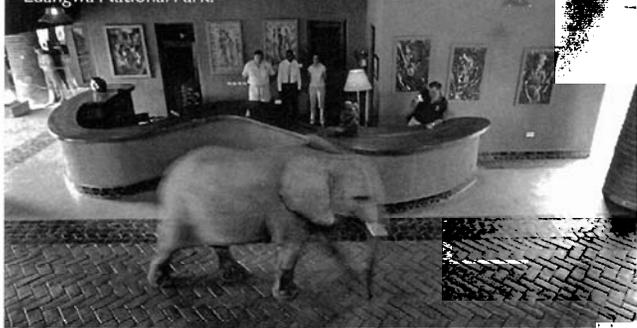
Rafting on the Zambezi River.

(260-1-213303; chaminuka.com; doubles, \$500, all-inclusive). Built by an eccentric in the 1920s, **Shiwa Ngandu** is an English manor house in the remote North Zambian bush, complete with silver service, four-poster beds, horseback riding, and fishing (260-1-220747; shiwa

### HOT TIP

From November through December more than five million straw-colored fruit bats inhabit the forests of Kasanka National Park. At sunset, watch them take flight in a massive wave (kasanka.com).

Boundaries blur at Mfuwe Lodge in South Luangwa National Park.



ngandu.com; doubles, \$700, including meals). In South Luangwa National Park, several camps seem engaged in a competition to be the most cossetting. Robin Pope Safaris, one of Zambia's foremost safari operators, owns **Tena Tena**, a cluster of 12 elegant tents, all with en suite bathrooms and showers that open to the elements. Robin Pope also offers walking safaris and fly-camping and recently opened **Luangwa House**, an exclusive four-suite bush retreat (260-6-246091; robinpope

safaris.net; Tena Tena doubles, \$840-\$980, all-inclusive; Luangwa House, \$2,000 for four people, all-inclusive). **Mfuwe Lodge** has 18 pleasant bungalows overlooking a lagoon (260-6-245041; mfuwelodge.com; doubles, \$380, all-inclusive). The Bush Camp Company, which owns Mfuwe, also operates five notable bush camps in the park (260-62-45041; bushcampcompany.com). Expect warm hospitality, great food, and good value at **Kafunza River Lodge**, reached by ferry from

South Luangwa Park. The swimming pool and natural hot tub are a bonus for weary travelers (260-6-246046; luangwa.com; doubles, \$420, all-inclusive). **Kaingo Camp**, where photo hides allow visitors to covertly observe several hundred grunting hippos, is a favorite of shutterbugs (260-6-245064; kaingo.com; doubles, \$880, all-inclusive), and at **Tafika Camp**, guests can take a 15-minute flight in a microlight aircraft (264-61-240561; remoteafrica.com; doubles, \$375-\$465, including meals; flights, \$90 per person). In Lower Zambezi National Park, **Sausage Tree Camp** has brought white tents and an upbeat atmosphere to this spectacular reserve (260-1-212597; sausagetreecamp.com; doubles, \$680-\$1,048, all-inclusive) and **Chiawa Camp** offers some of the region's best canoe trips (260-1-261588; chiawa.com; doubles, \$1,100, all-inclusive). Each season, a few of the old-style bush camps—

constructed of wood and reeds, with bucket showers—are erected from scratch. One fine example is **Mwaleshi** in North Luangwa National Park, situated in a wilder part of the valley rich with lions and buffalo (264-61-240561; remoteafrica.com; doubles, \$700, all-inclusive).

**RESOURCES** The Zambia National Tourism Board provides a good overview of the country on its site, [zambiatourism.com](http://zambiatourism.com). For birding, photographic, and other specialty tours of Zambia, contact **Africa Geographic** (27-21-762-2180; [africa-geographic.com/expeditions](http://africa-geographic.com/expeditions)). **Star of Africa** sells a variety of itineraries, with overnight stays in its own terrific lodges ([star-of-africa.com](http://star-of-africa.com)). Chris McIntyre, who wrote the excellent **Bradt Travel Guide** to Zambia, offers advice and a booking service through his agency, **Sunvil** (44-20-8568-4499; [sunvil.co.uk](http://sunvil.co.uk)). —David Rogers

## HOT TIP

Local guides lead walks through 700-year-old Mukuni Village, just outside Livingstone. Tours begin and end at the village market, an excellent place to find highly original batiks and wood carvings.